

Guide for Facilitators

For EcoSattva Training Groups

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Introduction

Thank you for offering to facilitate an EcoSattva Training group. Whether you are facilitating one group meeting or all of them, your contributions are very much appreciated. Your willingness to support others as they engage with the Training materials is a gift. It is a gift to your group, a gift to One Earth Sangha, and a gift to the world. Thank you.

This Guide contains suggestions on how you might customize your group and some ideas on how to facilitate a group. If you are new to facilitating group process, it might be especially helpful. It is based on the wisdom of the Dharma, best practices described in the facilitation literature, and our personal experiences. Please use it in whatever ways are helpful to you. Take what is useful and ignore the rest.

Customizing the Offering

We invite you to customize session elements based on what you know about your group and its culture and your own style. Between you and your group, we hope you will make this your own.

Considerations Regarding Group Size

A good size for a group doing the EcoSattva Training is anywhere from five to twelve people. If there are more participants than this, it's difficult for everyone to have enough airtime to talk and it will be more difficult to create a sense of friendship and intimacy.

If you think that more than twelve people will come, you could split into smaller groups or if that's not practical, find another space and identify additional facilitator(s).

To develop and sustain trust in the group, we suggest that you encourage participants to attend all group meetings and “close” the group to new participants after the first two meetings.

Sample Meeting Format

Each EcoSattva Training session will focus on a different topic, and we suggest that you focus on one session at each group meeting. Sessions are designed for 60 - 90 minute-meetings.

We recommend that *group members watch the session videos on their own time before gathering*. This will maximize the time available for sharing, discussion, and connection. Here is a suggested format to help you organize your meeting; please adjust it to meet your needs.

- Opening: 20 - 30 min
 - Welcome and overview of the meeting agenda
 - Arriving in presence meditation. If your gathering doesn't begin with an extended meditation, this could be from 5 - 15 min in length. You might consider reading a poem, or offering a guided meditation or a simple ritual, such as lighting candles. [Here are some examples of short guided arriving meditations](#).
 - Check-ins and reflections on the previous meeting, focusing on what has heart and meaning for the participants
 - Reviewing and affirming the shared group agreements.
 - See the [Circle of Trust Touchstones](#) and the [East Bay Meditation Center's Agreements for Multicultural Interactions](#) for example shared agreements that may be useful as a starting point.
- Core Content: 30 - 45 min
 - Explore the session's topic using the suggested activities. We will provide discussion prompts, inquiry questions and exercises for groups and individuals. These may include talking with a partner, small or whole group discussions, simple rituals, journaling, meditations, and experiential exercises. If you are new to group facilitation, we invite you to review the following a few of the possibilities laid out in [Liberating Structures](#) (a brilliant Creative Commons resource). You might find [1-2-4-all](#) and [Conversation Café](#) familiar but there is much more to choose from.

- Invite participants to continue working with the materials offered at this session and encourage them to look at the follow-up resources and activities on the EcoSattva Training website between sessions
- Closing: 5 - 15 min
 - Logistics for the next session
 - Appreciations
 - Meditation - 1 - 3 min
 - Dedication of merit - you could use [One Earth Sangha's](#) or prepare your own.

Facilitating Meetings

Based on our experience with previous EcoSattva Trainings, different types of facilitation are helpful for different types of groups. Informal groups consisting of a few friends may need very little or no facilitation. Groups comprised of acquaintances or colleagues may need a little more. And groups made up of people who don't know each other may need the most facilitation.

It may also be helpful to think about how you see yourself as a facilitator. Do you see yourself as someone who convenes the group and then acts mostly as a participant? Or do you see yourself as a convenor and someone who goes on to facilitate the group's process. Either role, and anywhere in between them, is great!

Thinking about the group's need for the facilitation and your own style may help you to decide on the type of facilitation that's most appropriate - "light" or "active". This Guide attempts to cover both "light" and "active" facilitation, although we have erred on the side of providing more suggestions rather than just the bare minimum.

Following this introduction, there is a general description of the role of a facilitator and then there are specific suggestions on what facilitators can do to:

- Help to create and sustain a space for transformation
- Work with participants' strong emotions
- Support deep and authentic group discussions
- Recognize and work with vital differences in a group
- Respond to conflict constructively

In two of these sections, we offer “Additional suggestions for active facilitation”.

The Role of a Facilitator

At the most general level, the role of a facilitator in this Training is to support the group in fully and authentically engaging with the material in the sessions. It is about inviting participants to open to, and stay connected with their hearts, as well as their minds, their bodies as well as their heads, their emotions as well as their thoughts. In other words, it is about helping participants to experience and respond to the climate crisis as whole human beings.

More specific facilitation roles include:

- Balancing your role as a facilitator with your participation in the group. The invitation is to do both.
- Modeling heart qualities, such as loving kindness, gratitude, compassion, forgiveness, taking joy in others, and equanimity.
- Intervening to ensure that the group's shared agreements are respected.
- Keeping an eye on the time and balancing the suggested activities (e.g., watching the videos, discussions, and experiential exercises) with the group's need to process its own interactions. This is often referred to as maintaining a balance between a group's tasks and its process.

A Space for Transformation

Probably the most important way that a facilitator can support a group in fully and authentically engaging with the material in the sessions is to help create and sustain a safe, positive environment - a space for transformation. This is because a safe, positive environment makes it more likely that people will participate in a deeply personal way that will lead to individual and group transformation.

Here are some suggestions to do this:

- Offering all participants your warm and compassionate presence.

- Inviting participation from all members of the group, while appreciating that some people may choose not to speak.
- Notice who is speaking and who is silent. If some people dominate the discussion, you might consider intervening. Conversely, if some people are not speaking, you could invite them to speak saying something like “Would anyone who has not spoken yet like to say something?” It’s best to avoid asking specific individuals to speak.
- Suspending your own judgments, as best you can, and refraining from advocating your own views and beliefs.

Additional suggestions for active facilitation

- Intervening if you notice people judging others, making assumptions, or offering unsolicited advice.
- If the group’s energy is either low or high, you could invite the group to take some full, deep breaths, stand up, and/or do some mindful movement.
- If someone is emotionally struggling or stuck, it might be appropriate to remind them of sources of wisdom and guidance, for instance from the voice of their heart, their wisest self, or a benefactor.

Strong Emotions

The EcoSattva Training materials may surface strong emotions, such as sadness, fear, grief, anger and guilt. These emotions do not need to be avoided or feared. Almost the opposite: The more that participants are willing to be open and express their sadness, fear, grief, anger and guilt, the more they are likely to experience transformative insights about themselves and the world.

If there is a safe and positive environment, it is likely that the group will respond to strong emotions with understanding and compassion. You don’t have to do it all! But in addition, it may be appropriate for you, as the facilitator, to offer support. Here are some suggestions for doing this:

- Honor participants' emotions by being fully present, without trying to make them feel better. Tears can be a release and a source of healing, so let them flow. Our tears for the world can cleanse our eyes and help us to see everything more clearly.
- Be aware of your own strong emotions about the climate crisis as this will help you to support others in feeling theirs.
- Respect participants' boundaries, defenses and resistance. People can only experience so much emotion at one time before they become overwhelmed or numb out. That said, sometimes it can be appropriate to gently challenge them to go deeper.

Group Discussions

Each session will contain discussion prompts and inquiry questions intended to support deep and authentic group discussions. These suggestions may be helpful to support these conversations.

- Use the discussion prompts and inquiry questions provided to the extent they are useful for the group. You do not need to use all of them, and you could supplement them with your own relevant prompts and questions.
- Encourage and model mindful listening by listening with your heart as well as your head, maintaining an open and curious attitude and not interrupting while people are speaking.
- Try to understand what is being said before you mentally prepare a response. If appropriate, ask questions of clarification after the person has finished talking, or summarize what was said.
- Encourage and model mindful speaking by saying only what you know to be true, helpful, necessary and kind. Speak from your own experience and from your heart.

Vital Differences

In any group, there will be vital differences of race, gender, age, ability, etc., as well as differences in power and privilege. Welcoming and supporting difference will enhance personal and group transformation.

Understanding differences in a group offers opportunities to celebrate the strength that can come with diversity, at the same time as we acknowledge our shared common humanity. Understanding differences in power and privilege offers opportunities to correct systemic racism, injustice and oppression in ourselves and in social institutions.

Here are a few suggestions:

- If you are new to working with differences in groups and/or you are white, male, able-bodied, neither young nor old or are otherwise privileged, we encourage you to do some research on power and privilege and/or white supremacy.
- All participants can be supported by you and the rest of the group to uncover and work with their own biases, prejudices, power and privilege.
- You could invite the group to commit to the [East Bay Meditation Center's Agreements for Multicultural Interactions](#), especially understanding the difference between intention and impact, as part of the group shared agreements

Responding to Conflict

Conflict in groups is inevitable and when handled skillfully it can lead to insight and a greater sense of trust and safety. Like strong emotions, conflict in groups does not need to be feared or avoided.

- Try to be aware of conflicts in the group before they escalate. If not dealt with, conflicts can go underground, expand and turn into resentments that can undermine group trust and safety.
- Step back from the immediate disagreement and look at the larger picture of the whole group. Notice the group dynamics. Are there different factions in the group? Is someone being scapegoated? Do some people feel marginalized or not heard in the group?
- As best you can, stay open to different perspectives. You might support those who may feel marginalized or not heard but be aware of any tendencies to project need where it is not and respond by rescuing.

- Understanding the [illusion of neutrality or impartiality](#) can help you as a facilitator maintain awareness of your own cultural conditioning and then rely on mindfulness and curiosity that includes your own process.
- It can be helpful to invite people to pause, take a few deep breaths and speak from their hearts about their experience in the present moment, by making “I” statements and suspending their judgments about others.
- If a shared agreement is being violated, remind everyone about the intentions behind their shared agreements.

Additional suggestions for active facilitation

- Whenever possible, support those in conflict to resolve it themselves, however, if a conflict threatens to disrupt the entire group, it may be appropriate to actively intervene to resolve it.
- If you decide to actively intervene, it can be helpful to consider what the conflict is actually about because this can help you to respond effectively. For example:
 - If it's about different beliefs, views or philosophies, you could say something like “Let's pause for a minute. I invite each of you to say what is underneath your words. What is the desire, fear, concern, or need that leads you to that view?”
 - If it's about someone trying to impose their personal agenda on the group and says something like “I know what's best in this situation,” you could acknowledge their point of view and exercise your power as the facilitator by offering to take it into consideration and supporting the comments of others.
 - If it's about a misunderstanding, you could invite those involved to say more and explain what they mean
 - If it's about differing personality types, you could identify what the participants have in common, for example concern about the climate crisis, appreciate the diversity in the group, and lead a discussion about possible solutions.

- If the conflict only involves 1-2 people and you think they can resolve it themselves, you could ask them if they are willing to deal with it outside the group meeting.

Concluding Words

We hope that these suggestions are useful. This is the first edition of this Guide, so if you have additional suggestions that you would like us to consider for inclusion in future editions, or if you have any comments, please send them to us at:

connect@learthsangha.org

In closing, thank you, once again, for your willingness to step into the role of being a facilitator for this Training. We hope that your experience is beneficial to you as you make your own response to the climate crisis.

Resources

[Circle of Trust Touchstones](#) Facilitators of Courage & Renewal programs use these basic Touchstones to help define clear boundaries for the circle of trust in retreats and programs, the kinds of boundaries that help create safe space for the soul. They derive from the principles and practices of the Circle of Trust® approach.

Climate Conversations. <https://climateconversations.sg/>

Council on the Uncertain Human Future. <https://councilontheuncertainhumanfuture.org/>

East Bay Meditation Center, Agreements for Multicultural Interactions

<https://eastbaymeditation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Agreements-Multicultural-Interactions-15.09.13.pdf>

Essential Facilitation Skills for an Effective Facilitator by Robert Cserti.

<https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/facilitation-skills/>

Liberating Structures, Including and Unleashing Everyone.

<http://www.liberatingstructures.com/>

Productive Conversations: Using Advocacy and Inquiry Effectively. Systems Thinker.
<https://thesystemsthinker.com/productive-conversations-using-advocacy-and-inquiry-effectively/>

Seeds for Change, Resources on Facilitation
<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/facilitationmeeting>

Strategic Questioning: An Approach to Creating Personal and Social Change (1997).
<https://gustavus.edu/provost/faculty-l/attachments/strategic-questioning.-short.pdf>

The Circle Way. <http://www.thecircleway.net/>

Unlocking the Magic of Facilitation: 11 Key Concepts You Did Not Know You Did Not Know by Sam Killerman
[http://facilitationmagic.com/downloads/\[E-BOOK\]%20Unlocking%20the%20Magic%20of%20Facilitation%20by%20Sam%20Killermann%20and%20Meg%20Bolger.pdf](http://facilitationmagic.com/downloads/[E-BOOK]%20Unlocking%20the%20Magic%20of%20Facilitation%20by%20Sam%20Killermann%20and%20Meg%20Bolger.pdf)